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ABSTRACT

Information is presented from a study examining the characteristics of Sam Houston State University (SHSU) undergraduate students with respect to their age and grade point average (GPA). It was hypothesized that there was no significant difference between the GPAs of traditional and nontraditional students at SHSU. The 398 individual subjects were drawn from the population by systematic sample of the 1988 fall semester roster. Study results rejected the hypothesis because the nontraditional students made significantly higher GPA (2.95 versus 2.54) than the traditional students. There was a significant correlation between age and GPA. This could give rise to the possibility that the findings could be generalized to other institutions. If other studies support these findings, it may provide some insight into the academic needs of and changes for nontraditional students. Tables are included. Contains 5 references. (SM)

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NONTRADITIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS AND GRADE POINT AVERAGES

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Introduction

Through the years, there has been a growing concern about the academic performance of American school students. This concern exists at all levels from kindergarten through postsecondary education. One thing that has caused concern among educators is the decline in academic skills among high school students preparing for college. The Chronicle of Higher Education (1984) gives evidence of this general decline from decreases in the results of the American College Testing Program's (ACT) aptitude tests and the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) from 1963 to 1979. Numerous studies on the academic and study skills of college students have been undertaken due to this national decline in academic skills (Cross, 1976).

For the most part, one population which seems to have been excluded from studies on academic performance in college is the returning adult student. One study which did examine ACT scores and first year grade point average (GPA) of veterans and older adults was done by Reed and Murphy (1975) who discovered no significant differences when comparing them then to younger adults. However, the American College Testing program reports that older students tend to earn lower ACT scores but higher college grades than would be expected (Maxey, 1982). This would indicate that there seems to be some question about academic achievement regarding the age of the student.

Not only is there some question about the academic performance of the college students, there is also a question about what constitutes a typical American college student. Hruby (1985, p. 26) indicates that the National Institute of Education (NIE) statistics indicates that two out of every five college students are over the age of 25. He also states that "American educators persist in thinking of the typical American college student as being no older that 22."

There seems to be little comparative data available pertaining to the GPA of older college students. This information could be valuable to colleges and universities in assessing institutional policies, course availability, academic advisement, housing, and many other items.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to examine the characteristics of Sam Houston State University (SHSU) undergraduate students with respect to their age and GPA. Even though there seems to be a large number of nontraditional students (those over 25 years of age) attending SHSU; there is little comparative data available to assess the characteristics of these students.

The information would be useful to the university to better assess the undergraduate student who have attended or are attending the university. University programs seem to be directed more toward the traditional student. The increasing enrollment of older students would necessitate the need for a more diversified program to accommodate these nontraditional students at SHSU, as well as other universities.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the grade point averages of traditional students and nontraditional students at Sam Houston State University.

Methods

Individual subjects were drawn from the population by systematic sample of the 1988 fall semester roster at SHSU. There was a total sample of 398 students

selected from the population. The sample included a group of students 17 through 24 years of age, designated as the traditional group, and a group of students greater than 24 years of age, designated as the nontraditional.

The information was obtained through the Registrar's Office at SHSU via a computer program specifically produced for gathering the data. The sample was selected from 8331 traditional students and 3197 nontraditional students.

Analysis of Data

A summary of the data for the student body is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency and Percent for SHSU Sample

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Male	186	46.7%
Female	212	53.3%
Traditional Student	218	54.8%
Nontraditional Student	180	45.2%
Freshmen	78	19.6%
Sophomores	76	19.1%
Juniors	78	19.6%
Seniors	107	26.9%
Graduates	27	6.8%
Post-Graduates	32	8.0%

Table 2 shows the descriptive data for the students in the SHSU sample. Table 3 gives the *t* -value for female and male students and the traditional and nontraditional students. The *t* -value of 3.61 is significant at the .01 level. The females' GPA is .25 points higher than the males'. There is a significant difference also in the GPA of the traditional and nontraditional student. The *t* -value of 7.51 is

significant at the .01 level. The nontraditional students make a significantly higher GPA.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for SHSU Sample

Characteristic	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Age	26.69	23.0	20.0	8.86
Cumulative Hours SHSU	51.18	38.0	3.0	39.21
Fall Hours Taken SHSU	10.78	12.0	12.0	5.14
Grade Point Average	2.67	2.67	4.00	0.72

Table 3

t - test with Probability for GPA

Variable	Mean	SD	*t*	prob
Female	2.79	0.77	3.61	<.01
Male	2.54	0.64		
Traditional	2.44	0.66	7.51	<.01
Nontraditional	2.95	0.69		

Table 4 indicates that there is a significant correlation between age and GPA. This indicates that the older the student, the higher the GPA.

Table 4

Correlation of Age and GPA

	r value	probability
Age vs GPA	0.423	<.01

Summary

The hypothesis was rejected. The nontraditional students made significantly higher GPA (2.95 versus 2.54) than the traditional students. There was a significant correlation between age and GPA. This could give rise to the possibility that the findings could be generalized to other institutions. If other studies support these findings, it may provide some insight into the academic needs and changes for nontraditional students. Another advantage to this type of study would be to provide institutions with and overall picture of the characteristics of their students. The difficulty of this study has to do with pinpointing the reasons grade point averages of nontraditional students are higher than those of traditional students.

By knowing the increase of nontraditional students, universities could provide other services that would be more appropriate for the nontraditional student. Most would guess that the older students are more mature and more serious about their studies. Gaining insight into why grade point averages of these students are higher may help colleges discover key factors to assist in raising other student' averages.

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